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**Innovative marketing strategies for
national industrial flagships:
Brand repositioning for accessing upscale
markets**

Research Memorandum 2011-42

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Innovative Marketing Strategies for National Industrial Flagships: Brand Repositioning for Accessing Upscale Markets

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Abstract

Product and process innovations are generally regarded as strategic competitive vehicles in industry. Identifying and conquering new market niches through focused marketing approaches – by emphasizing new product qualities in mature markets – has become a very appropriate innovation strategy in developed economies. Highlighting brand identity of high-quality firms – through repositioning with the aid of touchpoints – may then be a rewarding business case. This paper aims to demonstrate the relevance of innovative marketing strategies on the basis of brand repositioning of mature firms. It uses a case study approach to ‘flagship’ firms in Sweden to test the economic viability of repositioning of innovative firms striving to access upscale markets. The paper develops finally, based on the theoretical and empirical knowledge acquired from the case studies, a general analysis framework that may be useful for further study of brand repositioning and that may also serve as guidance for companies intending to reposition their brand to upscale markets.

Keywords: innovation, repositioning, brand identity, touchpoints

1. Innovation of Firms in Mature Markets

Innovation is a prominent change agent in our contemporary society. It is often regarded as the source of economic progress and vitalization. Seminal contributions on the economics of innovation can be found in the writings of Schumpeter (1934) and Kamien and Schwartz (1962). These early contributions focused the attention in particular on industrial market structures (e.g., monopoly power, scale and size effects of industrial firms), but less on the service sector or the public sector. In the past decade, an avalanche of studies has been published on entrepreneurial motives for innovation, on the knowledge factors involved in innovation, on the policy drivers or facilitators of innovation, and on the broader societal context of innovation (e.g., the creative class; see Florida, 2005). Recent studies on innovation and growth include amongst others, Capello and Nijkamp (2009) and de Groot et al. (2004).

An important change in innovation studies and practice has been the shift from technological progress studies towards behavioral and organizational aspects of innovation. Consequently, the creation and foundations of technological change have been given more attention, as well as the diffusion and the impact of technological change, following earlier studies of Hägerstrand (1967). Knowledge and creativity are increasingly regarded as the new engines of innovation, as they may stimulate more flexibility, design of out-of-the-box concepts, managerial diversity, and smart search behaviour.

Another important component of modern innovation systems is the fact that socio-cultural value systems and market conditions are seen as critical success factors for the firm's innovative behaviour. In other words, innovation is not exclusively focused on new products, but also on the creation of new processes, procedures, management styles, and even product images that enhance the buyers' satisfaction. Examples of this trend are new 'local for local' production systems, national identity products, etc. In this context, innovative marketing strategies that offer a new image for an existing good (or an improved variant thereof) may be seen as important vehicles of a firms' innovative behavior. Re(branding) of products is a good example of novel marketing approaches. This will be the focal point of the present paper, which will address repositioning marketing strategies for accessing upscale markets.

The core concept of this paper is ‘repositioning’ which is treated in the marketing literature as a process applied by companies that are aiming to transform their image and the customer’s beliefs about the brand or the product’s attributes. This policy is necessary for coping with deficiencies occurring at a time, in terms of image and the beliefs of customers regarding a brand by highlighting those attributes of the brand that are appreciated by the buyers, or by developing a new model, with superior performance, that will match the firm’s capabilities with the market demand (Hooley et al., 1998; Turner, 2003).

This paper will focus specifically on brand repositioning to upscale markets which can be defined as a process that implies a strategic change in a brand’s value proposition in order to be able to reach higher-end segments. Such a repositioning strategy of a firm may manifest itself through a change in the product design, brand image, brand name or formulation of the concept in order to modify the competitive position of the product in the marketplace (Zikmund & D’Amico, 1993). It is noteworthy that Ryan et al. (2007, p. 81) claim that this strategic change may sometimes be more intellectual than transformational.

After addressing the main concepts of this paper we will present our analytical approach and the methods that have been applied in our study (Section 2 and 3). In Section 4 the empirical findings will be analyzed and compared with the theories presented in the paper. Afterwards in Section 5, based on the discussion on repositioning and fundamental elements of a brand as well as the novel perspectives resulting from the case studies, a general analysis framework will be presented, underlining the main dimensions for a successful brand repositioning. The final section will present a critical view of the study and some implications for future research.

2. Positioning, Brand Identity, Touchpoints and Repositioning

Innovation without a proper marketing approach is bound to fail. But in a competitive market passive information and marketing strategy is not very effective. If firms want to reach upscale markets by means of existing mature products, it is necessary (i) to add new qualities to their product in order to attract interest and appreciation for their product, and (ii) to develop appropriate repositioning strategies to access new upscale markets. Brand repositioning of existing flagship industries is then a *sine qua non*. According to Doyle and Stern (2006) there are

three main reasons for a firm to adopt such a strategy. Firstly, the target segment might be no longer attractive due to its size, competitiveness, profitability and stability. The other reason may originate from the product itself, its quality or features might not appeal to the target segment. And yet, another reason may be that the high product costs make it less price competitive. Trout (1996), in turn, claims that there are a number of reasons which hinder companies from meeting the customers' demand and consequently are forcing them to adopt a different repositioning strategy. Among these reasons are: the fast pace of changing technology, the unexpected shifts in consumers' attitudes (see Chen et al., 2006), or an increase of competition in the global economy (Trout, 1996).

However, there are a number of risks associated with repositioning. According to Hankinson and Cowking (1993) the main risk could be the loss of focus from the original proposition due to limitation on the management side in analyzing and thus understanding the market. The new proposition of the firm may not succeed either due to a failure to meet or exceed the expectations of the original customer base (Uggla, 2006). At the same time, the company may fail to acquire new customers, or, in a better case, it may take some time until the benefits of the strategic change are realized by the customers (Corstjens & Doyle, 1989). Moreover, the repositioning to an upscale market requires enormous investments, mainly for advertising and for delivering increased customer experience. As Kapferer and Bastien (2008) state, the more upper the market segment, the more selective will be the brand in the distribution; and the more expensive and image-driven, the higher the quality and the more abundant and intense the customer experience.

To better understand the repositioning to upscale markets, specifically premium and luxury markets, the distinctive features of the products and services in these market segments should be highlighted. Fionda and Moore (2009) have recently identified the most important dimensions of a luxury brand. According to the authors these are: *clear brand identity; marketing communication; product integrity; brand signature; premium; exclusivity; heritage; luxury environment and experience; culture*. These characteristics put emphasis on those areas which need to be reinforced by companies in order to successfully reposition to an upscale market. Furthermore, most of these dimensions could be applied as well to the premium brands, but to a lesser extent.

Furthermore, in order to better understand the process of repositioning to upscale markets, there is a need to reconsider the fundamental elements of the brand (Figure 1). Therefore, before the strategic repositioning comes into effect, the company has to rethink its initial position, restructure its brand identity and create new touchpoints in order to appeal to the new target market the company is aiming at. Figure 1 illustrates these fundamental elements of the brand.

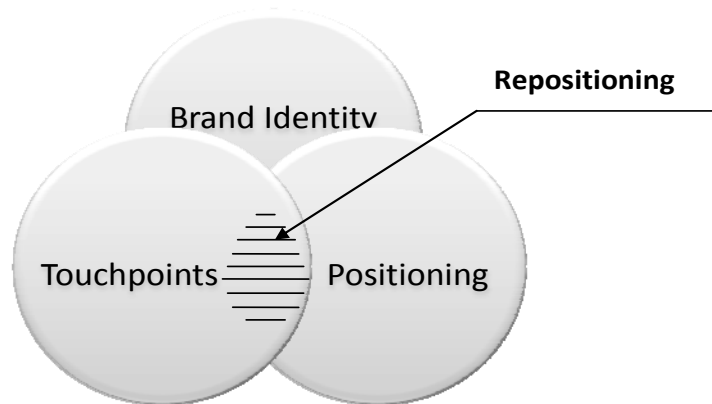


Figure 1 Fundamental elements of brand repositioning

To commence with, the concept of ‘positioning’ is defined by Trout and Ries (1982) and Mardsen (2002) as the way in which a brand is positioned in the mind of consumers, not by creating something new and different, but by manipulating what is already present in the current image. Kotler (2000) similarly defines the term positioning as ‘the act of designing the company’s offerings and image to occupy a distinct place in the target market’s mind’.

Repositioning is an innovative and creative process which is undoubtedly different from positioning. A strong differentiator is considered to be the element of ‘*change*’ inherited in the repositioning process (Porter, 1996; Turner, 2003; Zikmund & D’Amico, 1992; Ryan et al., 2007).

Depending on the circumstances, the element of change could redound upon the product design, brand image, brand name, target segment, competitive position of the product in the marketplace etc. Moreover, as Ryan et al. (2007) state: ‘the repositioning is a feasible means of

strategic change which is more intellectual than transformational' (p.81). Therefore, in the process of transformation it often occurs that the brand identity has to be remodelled, while only minor changes have to be made to the product of the company itself. Kumar (1999), in addition, asserts that in a dynamic marketing environment the repositioning is of the same importance to the firm as the initial positioning strategy formulation.

Furthermore, the second element illustrated in Figure 1, the 'brand identity', is of vital importance for the brand existence. Therefore, there is a need to look at the brand identity as it was first created and to search for the possible opportunities to restructure it in a way that would fit the repositioning strategy (Temporal, 1999).

Strong brand identity is perceived as one of the fundamental elements of a company that help tailor a brand image in the customer's mind-set (Keller, 1993; Ghodeswar, 2008; McCormack et al., 2004). According to Ghodeswar (2008) brand identity represents a unique set of brand associations delivering a promise to the target market. The brand associations have a purpose of value generation based on assessing functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits (Aaker, 1996; Puglise & Cagan, 2002; Ghodeswar, 2008). Therefore, the brand is no longer only a source of tangible product representation, but also a source of relational variables that are able to affect the target market. Aaker (1996) moved further in expanding the benefit issues into four key brand identity perspectives:

Product; according to Aaker (1996, p. 78) product-related associations will in most of the cases be an important part of a brand identity, because they are directly linked to brand choice decisions and experience. Product-related associations include: product scope, product-related attributes, quality/value, associations with use occasion, associations with users, link to a country or region.

Organization; this perspective concentrates on the features of the company rather than on the features of product or service, being able to contribute to a value proposition. The features of the organization could be: innovation, drive for quality, concern for the environment, culture, values, and programs undertaken by the company;

Person; 'brand personality can create a stronger brand by establishing a relationship between the customer and a brand and by helping create a self-expressive benefit that becomes a mean of expressing the owner's personality' (Aaker, 1996, p. 84). Brand can be perceived as being:

competent, fun, trustworthy, upscale, casual, intellectual, active, or other personality traits (ibid. p.84).

Symbol; a strong brand symbol is able to provide cohesion and structure to a brand identity which can further increase the brand recognition. Anything that represents the brand can be a symbol: brand inheritance, visual associations and a number of metaphors.

Each of these perspectives addresses different issues of a brand that a company has to tackle to be able to target the desired market. Additionally, the perspectives that create a brand identity are closely related to value proposition and credibility that create a relationship between the company's brand and the customer. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) 'value proposition is created by the brand identity that may include emotional and self-expressive benefits as well as relationship construct' (pp. 49-50).

Consequently, a strong brand identity provides firms with possible benefits such as increased customer loyalty, less vulnerability towards competitors, higher profit margins, more favourable customers' response to price fluctuations (Keller, 2001). It is important to note that in order for a successful repositioning to take place there is a need to restructure the brand identity. Temporal (1999) noted that some of the companies choose to change their brand identity completely. The change may include not only creating a new logo, but also a new name, brand personality and structure. In some cases these measures are taken to solve the company's past problems that negatively impacted on the brand image and customer perceptions. Other companies are forced to revitalize well-known brands that have existed for a long time in order to position the brand and the product so as to adapt to the changing needs of the customers.

The third element of the brand is represented by the 'brand touchpoints'. Brand touchpoint is defined by Schultz et al. (1993) as 'any information-bearing experience that a customer or stakeholder has with a brand'. In order to match the company's vision regarding the brand with the brand image in the marketplace there is a need for every touchpoint to be closely related to the brand identity. The pivotal touchpoint is the product itself and its added value in the form of relationships, meaning and experience that it delivers to the customer. Physical products have a possibility to move further than only conveying information on the brand and its associations. In the process of customer's interaction with a product, the emotions and feelings are evoked. The

relationships that developed over time due to the customer/product interaction highly influence the brand image of a company (Boatwright, 2009).

According to Dunn and Davis (2003) touchpoints may be divided into three categories that represent different dimensions of a brand's interaction with a customer. The categories and their experience touchpoints are:

Pre-purchase experience - The touchpoints in this stage represent various possible interactions between the potential customers and the brand, before deciding to commit the purchase. These include: public relations, advertising, company's presence in the internet, partnerships.

Purchase experience – The purchase or usage experience touchpoints are those that move a customer from considering the brand to actually purchasing it. It includes: direct sales, point-of-purchase displays, and an assortment of products/services.

Post-purchase experience – This category includes customer service, billing, loyalty programs, product quality, newsletters, surveys and regular maintenance. Davis and Longoria (2003) noted that 'post-purchase brand touchpoints can be defined as all of the interactions that are created after the purchase experience stage is completed', this being done in order to maximize total brand experience (p. 2).

In the process of repositioning, most likely, the relationship that existed before between the brand and the customer should be further enhanced by creating new touchpoints. And in the case of the repositioning to upscale markets, the touchpoints have to be re-designed and/or newly created and further carefully managed. Hence, they may be considered as key elements of a creative marketing strategy.

3. Research Methodology

To test the above propositions, an exploratory qualitative approach is here the most appropriate, as it will serve as a tool to view the problem in the current study from an operational perspective, while at the same time relating it to the existing literature (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Therefore, it will assist us in gaining greater understanding in the field of repositioning and finding the dimensions for a successful repositioning to upscale markets. Clearly, the knowledge acquired

from existing theories and from the empirical data collected will not provide conclusive answers to all problems, but it will supplement the existing theory on brand repositioning. Furthermore, it will offer guidance to companies intending to access upscale markets and will serve as a signpost for further research in the area.

The present paper relies heavily on multiple sources of evidence, because of the lack of empirical studies in this particular field. In addition, the aim of the research is partly to contribute to theory generation, as theory on brand repositioning from mass-market to premium brands and from premium to luxury brands is just emerging, and therefore, the usage of a case study research strategy is of a great importance. In our case, the selection of the cases was not made on a random basis, but was inspired by an initial idea of finding just a very limited number of companies which have over the last three decades experienced an evolution to upscale markets. As a result, two Swedish companies have been chosen for this purpose, the premium safety and occupational footwear manufacturer ‘Arbesko’ and the luxury bed manufacturer ‘Hästens Sängar’, which have managed to successfully reposition themselves in the marketplace. Our empirical study, based on the information acquired from these companies, intends to put forward the key success factors for a brand repositioning to upscale markets.

We will first present some basics on case study research. Yin (2003) provides that the case study method is appropriate when the investigators intend to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions rather than simply isolating variables; he distinguishes among six different data sources for a case study: *documentation, interviews, physical artefacts, direct observation, participant observation and archival records*. Our study will make use of the first three data sources. Therefore, the secondary data was collected from different sources, such as: one previous case study of Arbesko, as well as annual reports of both Hästens and Arbesko from the years 2007 and 2008. Yin (2003) suggests that various documents could be significant to every case study; however they should be carefully reviewed in order to select the appropriate data. In our case, even though the annual reports do not meet the purpose of the current research, some information has proven to be useful in adding to the knowledge about the companies concerned. In addition to the company documents mentioned above, our study has also received a number of informational artefacts. Hästens has provided us with a company profile book, as well as few brochures and catalogues, while we received from Arbesko some printed material on

the company's background, market strategy, products description and the innovations in the product development.

It should be noted, however, that our study has collected the qualitative data mainly through interviews. All the interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, lasting between one two hours. The interviews allowed the respondents to reflect on the topic in their own words and share their perceptions about the issues addressed in the interview, thus providing a deep insight and rich knowledge on the matter. All interviews took place in an informal setting at the site, which for Hästens is their head office as well their flagship store located in Köping and for Arbesko in Örebro.

In order to obtain a more objective and testable view on the conditions inherent in the repositioning strategy addressed in our studies, we have conducted a number of 10 interviews in total, 6 with Hästens' key employees and 4 with Arbesko's top management. We designed open questions in order to allow the interviewees to provide a developmental and cognitive answer, and to disclose their personal attitudes towards the discussed topics. The basic questions addressed in the in-depth interviews were related to the process of repositioning the companies went through and its phases, while also prominent attention was given to marketing-related questions. A few closed questions were also added during the interview, but these were mainly factual questions, e.g. concerning the years when certain events took place.

An important source for primary data collection has also been the guest lectures the CEOs of both companies held at Jönköping International Business School; these lectures were given in the spring of both 2009 and 2010. All interviews and guest lectures were audio-recorded and then written down word by word afterwards in order to get a complete picture of the collected data. Next, the most relevant information was selected and divided into meaningful categories linked to the research topic. Thus, some information was omitted because it was not related to the frame of reference or to the purpose of the study.

In our analysis section, a connection will be drawn between the theoretical and the empirical part, in order to be able to identify the similarities and differences in the brand repositioning process of the cases analyzed. This, as a result, has inductively led to the development of a new framework for better understanding the phenomenon under study.

Moreover, the display of the data has served as a means for drawing and verifying conclusions in the final part.

4. Research and Findings on Case Studies

Introduction

We will first concisely give some background information on both firms considered.

The company Hästens Sängar is the oldest bed manufacturer in Sweden which has started its activity in 1852 in the city of Köping. The company's focus has primarily been on the manufacturing of saddles and carriage furniture, the manufacturing of beds being only a very small part of the business. And, at the time when they started their activity, the products put forward by Hästens were regarded as necessity goods, thus they had no symbolic value. However, from the outset, the company has used only natural materials in order to offer high quality products to its customers. Consequently, this has allowed the company to charge a relatively high price for its products. Hence, the Hästens brand has established a strong position from the very start due to high-quality products that it brought to the market; while of great importance also is the fact that they were the first ones to do that. However, the main deficiency was that they have not been very clear in communicating this message to their potential customers.

Nowadays, Hästens Sängar AB is still a family company and owned by the fifth generation of the founding family. When in the late 1980's the company was going through a stagnation period, this marked the beginning of the brand repositioning process. Since then, the sales of first quality beds have risen by more than 30,000 percent. The company is currently established in 28 markets and continues to expand organically in existing markets and also in new markets. Furthermore, the export part of the business is steadily rising with an increase ranging from 4 percent in 1994 to 71 percent in 2009. Today, one seventh of the bed sales are in Sweden, while the rest of the sales are mostly in Europe. There are a total of 185 Hästens stores in Europe and 230 globally. Hästens does not own the stores, but offers a dealership (with the exception of the flagship stores in Köping and in Stockholm, which are both Hästens showrooms).

The marketing communications are very important for Hästens and it invests about 10 percent of its turnover on advertising and promotional material. The advertising of the Hästens brand takes place at three levels: local, national and global.

Arbesko AB is a safety and occupational shoe manufacturer in Sweden with a history dating back to 1839. The real beginning for the Arbesko AB is considered to be 1952, when the company sold its footwear production facilities to the competitors and therefore, concentrated on the production of safety and occupational safety footwear. Arbesko initially produced relatively cheap products and did not focus much on adding value to the products, as the vision was to constantly increase sales. In order to accomplish this, the company had mainly counted on the pioneer position it occupied, the lack of competition in the Swedish market and on the distribution channels it had developed over time. Furthermore, the Arbesko brand name did not have initially a strong position, because the company was using the brand name 'Stalex' when referring to safety footwear and brand name 'Stilex' for occupational footwear.

Since 1983, the company got a new manager who initiated the repositioning process. Nowadays, it holds approx. 80 percent of the Swedish market, producing almost 500,000 shoes a year. Presently, the company is a leading manufacturer in the industry of safety and occupational footwear production in Sweden. The main market of Arbesko is Scandinavia where it has up to 75 percent of the market share, with the sales outside Scandinavia providing only a small percentage of the total output. The company currently sells its products through distributors and retailers, as well as through direct sales to bigger companies. Sales to dealers comprise about 92 percent now, while another 8 percent are the direct sales.

Marketing communications are of increasing importance for the company, as it is growing the presence on the international scene. Currently, Arbesko spends 5 percent of their turnover on marketing communications.

Repositioning history

For Hästens the year 1987 is characterized by a change in ownership and thus could be considered as *the first* and the most drastic phase in the repositioning process which took place in the last decades. At that time, the company had three product categories: bed mattresses, saddles and beds. The beds were the smaller part of the company, however, as the sales manager affirms:

'The current CEO took the risk and dropped the manufacturing of saddles and bed mattresses, even though that was the bigger part of the company, and decided to concentrate only on the manufacturing of beds. It was extremely risky also because in that period the only ones who owned a Hästens bed were the dealers and also the hoteles ordered a small amount of the Hästens beds. The beds were even in that period considered very expensive to sell to the customers'.

The second phase of repositioning took place in 2003 when the company came up with the idea of opening concept stores. Thus, they were the first ones in this industry in Sweden to launch this concept. *'The main idea was to create a unique atmosphere in the store by combining the fictional fittings, the wall, the floor or the lightening look and feel, so if you go to Rome or Stockholm you can have the same feeling of the store'* (managing director of sales EMEA region). Also, in this period the company started to sell outside Scandinavia, where the company also opened concept stores and kept the Hästens commercials in the stores.

The third big strategic change took place 3 years ago, in 2007, when the company started to clearly communicate that they are luxury, and this process hasn't finished yet. An important role in this strategy should be assigned to the launch of the so-called 'Vividus' bed, the most expensive product of Hästens to date, which amounts to 60.000 euros and took 2 years to develop. Once with the launch of the Vividus, the company started saying that they have a new image, changed the advertising. The company has been working closely with highly-qualified consultants that helped them spread the right message about the company. And, these have helped the brand to raise to another level and has made it difficult for their rivals to compete against it. So, *'the Hästens brand is ofically still young in the luxury segment, but it has always been in that position'* (managing director of sales EMEA region). These repositioning stages were all initiated by the current CEO, his strategic decision being based on the forecasts and advices of the sales departments. The management and marketing teams have been further responsible for the introduction and development of the repositioning process.

As for Arbesko, from 1983 and afterwards, after having evaluated the situation, the CEO introduced many changes in order to boost the company's competitiveness. The company changed the decision of the price making which was no longer decided by the sales people of the

company but by the board of directors instead. Arbesko concentrated the production into their own facilities, instead of keeping the sub-contractors producing a part of the orders. This led to an increase in productivity in their own facilities and at the same time increased the profit margins, while afterwards the company delocalized a part of the production by introducing “semi-redime” product manufacturing, creating a possibility of outsourcing part of the production to the company owned by Arbesko in Brazil. Company started to increase the price as well by adding more values to the product; this started to lead the company to the repositioning from a mass-market segment to an upscale segment. *‘From the early beginning we decided to target the premium segment, based on our unique construction technique we add values that actually give ergonomically functional or technical or quality value’* (exports sales manager). Up to 1988-1989 company was still on its way to the top of the upscale pyramid, by offering high value added products to the customer. At the same time company increased the presence in the Nordic markets.

1992-1996 was the period when the company started to concentrate on its brand image. The company decided to increase the international presence in the safety and occupational shoe industry. After initiating brand awareness studies and extensive research, it was decided to merge the two brands of Stalex and Stilex under one brand, namely Arbesko. This was done in order to ease the expansion to the international market and to promote one brand instead of promoting two different brands.

Strategic brand repositioning

The major reason for Hästens to reposition has been the blurred image of the Hästens brand in the marketplace. This was caused by an unclear brand identity, where the company had failed to clearly communicate what their product stands for and what features make it different from other brands in the same category. On the contrary, for Arbesko the central reason has been the need to change the strategic direction, because the product category they were bringing to the market became overcrowded due to increased competition, which accordingly led to the erosion of the company’ sales and margins. The change in the distribution channels also served as a rationale for the firm to undertake the repositioning strategies. Furthermore, it is likely that both companies that they were forced to undertake the repositioning strategies, because the Swedish

market became more demanding. And, as Hästens and Arbesko chose to produce in Sweden, they could not compete on price and mass volumes, but instead had to offer a superior product. Therefore, the repositioning was both a strategic and a natural process, caused by changes in the market environment, which became more and more competitive.

Upscale markets

The repositioning for Hästens started with the abandonment of the bigger part of the business, the mattresses and the saddles manufacturing, thus leaving behind the largest part of the customer base in order to start targeting the upscale consumers. In the case of Hästens it has been an evolution from the premium to the luxury segment.

As for Arbesko, the market niche has changed from the mass-market segment to the premium segment, and in some countries outside Scandinavia Arbesko's products can also meet the criteria of luxury segments. Therefore, this upgrade has led to the loss of those customers for whom the new price of Arbesko products was not suitable any longer.

According to Aaker (1997), when a company decides to reposition to upscale markets there are two options: either use sub-brands or reposition the entire brand. The latter strategy was chosen by both Hästens and Arbesko. However, Hästens did not make significant changes to the company's offer, the product stayed basically the same, but they continued using only natural materials, the horse hair still being the central one, while they continued focusing on quality, periodically improving it in order to provide higher value to the customers. Clearly, the company focused on creative marketing approaches to communicate about the experience accumulated along the years of its existence, constantly putting emphasis on the words quality and craftsmanship. And, in addition, they have started to clearly communicate this to the market, telling a story about the historical roots of the company and constantly putting much emphasis on the tradition, heritage and naturalness that have been accumulated through generations.

Arbesko, in turn, has repositioned its entire brand through making considerable improvements to its product. Thus, the company improved the quality of the products by adding innovations, ergonomics and functionality to them. These improvements were further emphasized by the slogan adopted by the company 'Arbesko makes a difference'. Similarly to

Hästens, Arbesko started to tell its story, actually a more tailored one, about the quality and values added to their products and the effect that they have on the end-customer.

Restructuring Brand Identity

Hästens' brand identity stands for craftsmanship, products made from natural materials only, longevity and quality of the product, exclusivity and almost 160 years of heritage. The luxury is deeply related to the brand identity, as it helps to differentiate from the competition in the bed manufacturing industry. Arbesko as a brand stands for the pioneering experience in manufacturing safety and occupational footwear, representing high quality and innovativeness within the product and its values added. The company's brand identity is built on features that are characteristic for the premium segment. Furthermore, the Arbesko brand identifies itself as being the best in the industry of safety and occupational footwear, when it comes to ergonomics, functionality, technology added and quality of the product.

Our empirical data were analyzed on the basis of Aaker and Joachimsthaer's model (2000) of a brand identity system. Every element of the brand identity system (product, organization, personality and symbol) addresses different issues of a brand that a company has to reconsider to be able to target the desired market. In our case, it was clear that both companies are fulfilling the model, but in different dimensions and to a different extent. In this section both brands will be analyzed from the *product*, *organization*, *personality* and *symbol* perspectives.

Hästens presents the *product* made of natural materials and with a high level of craftsmanship, having deep roots in tradition. The product itself is characterized by high quality and by the ability to deliver increased experience to the high-end user. The Hästens product and its packaging both look luxury. The latest model of Hästens beds "Vividus" has given the company the opportunity to finally position itself as a company competing in the luxury segment, as the product is made of best materials, and applying the technology that considerably increases the sleeping experience. The blue-white check that is the most typical pattern used for Hästens beds is a strong brand differentiator.

The design of Arbesko shoes cannot be perceived as the most fashionable in the industry, although the company offers high quality, functional, innovative (from the perspective of technologies applied to the products) and ergonomic products which deliver increased

experience to the end-user. Arbesko uses a special pre-packing system and adapts its product to the requirements of the customers.

Both companies appear to concentrate on the product from the perspective of creating maximum end-user experience. They have also increased their attention to packaging, and have offered additional designs added to differentiate the product from other competitors. Hence, Hästens focuses on such factors as natural materials, craftsmanship, while Arbesko on adding values to their products. These differences exist mostly due to the fact that the companies belong to different industries.

Hästens as an *organization* can be characterized as being trustworthy, having a long heritage, being innovative as they were the first to come up with a concept store in the industry and continuously introducing new bed models and cooperating with well-known designers. The organization's main drivers are the quality and tradition. Therefore, it is using the best materials and equipment in order to produce the best quality beds in the industry. Hästens can be characterized as being a luxury brand due to the working environment, concentration on creating a luxury image for the company additionally to the image of its luxury products.

Arbesko as an organization is continuously striving for technological commitment and innovativeness. The organization continuously searches for new ways to add values to their products through in-house research and development activities. The company can be characterized as being trustworthy and a pioneer in the industry. As previously mentioned, Arbesko has a respectable history and a position of a first safety and occupational footwear producer in Sweden.

Similarly both organizations are aiming to be the best in the industry through innovativeness, continuous development and focusing on high quality that contributes to high value proposition. Companies share the trustworthiness and the long lasting history of existence in the market. Although Hästens organization has a focus on luxury since they are targeting the luxury segment, Arbesko could be characterized as a premium firm, even though they are on the top of the pyramid.

Hästens has a *personality* that encompasses feature like exclusivity, luxury, impressiveness due to the design and quality, trustworthiness and reliability, for instance, the company offers a 25-year guarantee covering spring or frame breakage.

Arbesko, being positioned in the safety and occupational footwear industry, associates its personality mostly with comfort. The company states that one of its main goals is to create a product that would deliver comfort to the end-user. There is, however, a need for Arbesko to improve the brand as a personality by creating additional relationships with the customer or helping the customer to express his/her personality. Since the product targets an industry where the quality and comfort are the most important characteristics for the customers, there is no need to put much emphasis on the brand personality.

The blue-white check is one of the most important *symbols* for Hästens. The blue-white check is already widely recognizable in the market and at the same time it differentiates the product from the rest of the market. This particular symbol is a part of the company's tradition since it was used for more than one generation. Another important symbol for Hästens is the 'horse' logo that symbolizes the company's origins as a saddle manufacturer, while the horse hair is one of the main natural materials used presently for producing beds. Concept stores are also an important vehicle of the company as they enhance their luxury image.

The symbols of Arbesko are: the brand name of the company itself with a logo of so-called "dancing people", the company's slogan "Arbesko makes a difference", and the special cap which is placed on the heel of the shoe. These are the main symbols that make the brand identity of both companies more distinctive and difficult to copy.

From the above observations, we may infer that the Hästens brand meets all criteria for a luxury brand as defined by Fionda and Moore (2009). The company has added or simply reinforced these features of a luxury brand during its repositioning process. Arbesko, on the other hand, does not meet all these criteria, since some dimensions previously discussed are less attributable to a premium brand. Similarly to Hästens, the Arbesko brand encompasses such features as clear brand identity, active use of marketing communications, product integrity, brand signature, heritage and culture. However, such dimensions as exclusivity, premium price, luxury environment and point-of-sale experience are not characteristic for the Arbesko brand.

Touchpoints in Creating Positive Customer Brand Perception

The touchpoints of *pre-purchase* experience stage represent a number of various ways of customer interaction with the brand before deciding to take a purchase decision (Dunn and Davis, 2003). Hästens Sängar uses a number of such touchpoints in order to shape perceptions and expectations towards the brand. The company uses an interactive and easy to navigate website, catalogues, DVDs (extensive information about the company and products), advertisements in magazines and newspapers that have a global presence, TV advertisement, social media networks, concept stores and exhibitions. Hästens uses a large number of touchpoints in order to increase the brand awareness and the positive perception about the brand.

Arbesko uses websites, events sponsorship, for instance World Skills, ads in magazines and union newspapers, and social networks as a means for creating touchpoints for the pre-purchase experience. Presence in social networks is a relatively new touchpoint for the company, although the company already started to utilize it effectively through social networks like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The company is also participating in safety and occupational equipment exhibitions. Furthermore, Arbesko is contacting some of the potential customers directly, providing all of the needed information about the company and products.

Hästens Sängar and Arbesko have created similar touchpoints; the difference is that Hästens managed to create the touchpoints that have a global presence. Although Arbesko is using many of the touchpoints in the pre-purchasing stage as well, there is still a need to increase the touchpoint presence in the global market.

According to Dunn and Davis (2003), the *purchase* or usage experience touchpoints are those that move a customer from considering the brand to actually purchasing it. Hästens uses the following touchpoints for the purchase stage: product assortment, packaging, delivery, purchase displays (concept stores), product performance and in-store sampling. Hästens has a large number of beds and the main models are displayed in the concept stores. Concept stores are designed in a way that will enhance potential customer experience and create the need for purchasing the product. Hästens is successful in using a large number of touchpoints in the purchase experience stage.

Arbesko is using similar touchpoints as Hästens: product assortment, packaging, delivery. Other touchpoints, for instance, purchase displays, products performance and indoor sampling are strictly dependent on the distributors and dealers. It is due to the specificity of the industry and the distribution channels. There is a need for the company to utilize more touchpoints in the process of purchase experience, as mostly relying on dealers and distributors may be relatively risky.

Post-purchase brand touchpoints can be identified as all of the interactions that are being created after the purchase experience stage is completed; this is done in order to maximize total brand experience (Davis and Longoria, 2003). The most important touchpoint for Hästens is the product and package performance. Hästens is known for the high performance products that offer the end user the maximum experience. The firm uses packaging that is itself luxury and differs from others in the industry. All other touchpoints in the post-purchase stage depend mostly on dealers. There are not many touchpoints for Hästens in the stage of post-purchase, because in most cases they do not have repetition customers. Furthermore, the product has a 25 years warranty for covering spring or frame breakage.

Arbesko is offering a customer service desk that is responsible for any of the problems that may happen during the stages of purchase and post-purchase. One of the most important touchpoints for the company is the product performance, the same being applicable to Hästens.

Both companies appear to lack touchpoints in the stage of post-purchase experience. As mentioned before, Hästens faces a problem of non-repetitive customers in its markets, although the increased experience in the post-purchase segment would increase word of mouth and thus increase the brand awareness the company is aiming for. For Arbesko, it is important to add some of the additional touchpoints to the post-purchase stage.

In conclusion, a careful investigation of the Hästens and Arbesko cases has provided evidence of the repositioning to upscale markets as being a viable strategy. The findings in both cases emphasize the importance of marketing innovativeness, apart from the regular improvements to the product itself, in order to achieve the desired international recognition and business performance. However, both companies still may have to dedicate efforts to the enhancement of the brand identity and the touchpoints, especially the ones in the post-purchase phase.

5. Design of a General Analysis Framework

Our case study research has not only brought to light interesting findings on individual innovative firms, but has also suggested the relevance of a more general analytical framework for repositioning strategies. This framework intends to put forward the essential dimensions of a successful brand repositioning strategy analyzed. The literature research on repositioning has allowed us to identify two main concepts: the brand identity and touchpoints. These are also among the core dimensions to consider when aiming at repositioning a brand to a higher-end market. The empirical evidence from our research has resulted in the identification of four additional dimensions: employees' commitment, improvements to the product, distribution channels, and careful management of international markets. We consider these elements to be crucial for the process of brand repositioning. These six fundamental dimensions are outlined in Figure 2, and will afterwards be concisely interpreted.

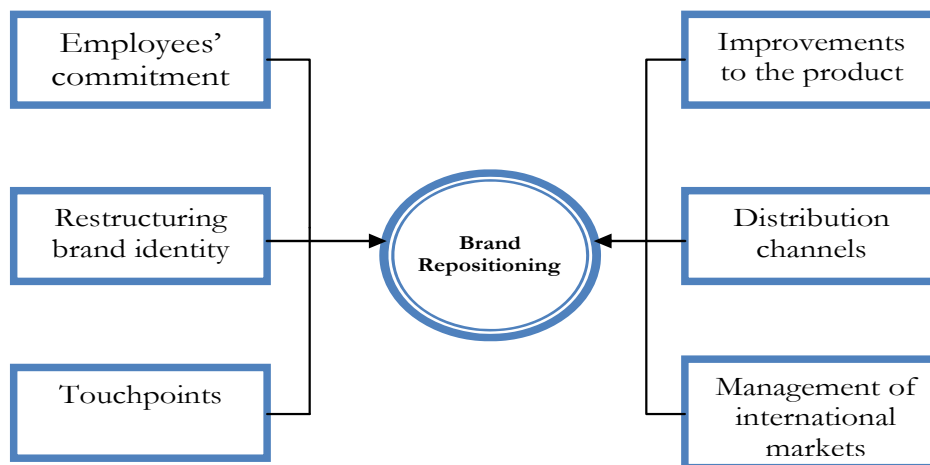


Figure 2 Dimensions of successful brand repositioning

Employees' commitment

This dimension is the engine of the repositioning process. In order to be successful it is essential that all employees, starting from the top management and ending with the workers in the factory, dedicate themselves to a common goal. Our case studies have confirmed this proposition. Hence, repositioning has to start with strategic decisions taken at the highest level of the organization, while afterwards it has to pass throughout the entire company. The employees at all levels have to be encouraged to participate in the strategic change of the company, by putting forward new ideas on how the business model could be improved. For instance, at Hästens and Arbesko, the suggestions regarding the product improvement usually came from the workers in the factory and have been afterwards tested, and in some cases adopted.

Restructuring brand identity

Companies that are willing to reposition their brands also need to restructure the brand identity, as it is considered to be one of the core elements of the strategy. Firms have to decide what kind of brand they want to be associated with in order to be able to target the right market. Companies thus have to redesign their brand carefully, considering all perspectives: brand as a good, brand as a company, brand as a personality and brand as a symbol. It is also essential to revise the core values that are a fundamental element of the brand identity, and further to translate them into messages that will appeal to potential customers. Therefore, firms must communicate to the external environment a story that will reflect the soul of the company.

Touchpoints

In the upscale markets touchpoints are of great importance, as they help potential customers to receive a high level of experience during the whole process of the product or service purchase. For the company that has recently repositioned towards the upscale market, the touchpoints in the pre-purchase experience are of high relevance. In order to generate and sustain a coherent brand identity there is a need to concentrate on public relations, advertising via channels that reach the accurate target market, website and other social media networks. In order to increase a customer's purchase experience, the company is required to ensure an image of luxury in the point-of-purchase displays, a product/service assortment must be present and visible to the

customer, and sales personnel have to suit the desired brand image. Companies that seek to retain their customers need also to increase the post-purchase experience through customer service, loyalty programs, newsletters and other possible touchpoints. Therefore, through experiencing all stages in the purchasing process, the customer is able to build his/her final perception of the brand image.

Improvements to the product

Companies that seek to reposition their brand to the upscale market segment have to improve their product, as it has to meet the needs and expectations of the potential customers. Premium and luxury segments stand for high quality and enhanced experience between the product and the customer. It is important to constantly upgrade the products by increasing their functionality, and by improving the design of the product and packaging. All features previously mentioned need to highlight the product or service as being high-end and therefore, be able to differentiate itself from the competition.

Distribution channels

Companies that are willing to access upscale markets have to take into consideration the distribution channels. Since the companies are aiming to target premium or luxury markets, distribution channels have to be chosen carefully in order to target the right segment. For upscale products the company has to consider the channels that are not used by the mass market, as it may deteriorate company's overall brand image. The company has to put emphasis on screening potential retailers or dealers; this is of utmost importance, especially when the company is considering the use of a license distribution channel. In general, apart from controlling where the product should be distributed, the firm has to decide 'how' it should be distributed. It is important to decide on the distribution method for delivering products that ensures that the products remain intact throughout the process.

Management of international markets

This dimension is extremely important in the repositioning process. A common characteristic of the two companies in our study was the interest in penetrating the external market, this actually being an important phase in the repositioning process. Therefore, in order to gain a market share

on the foreign grounds, the companies must adopt a flexible strategy in managing the international markets. Companies must localize their offer to a certain extent. In most cases, the core product and its attributes will be left unchanged, while the marketing campaign will be tailored to particular locations. For instance, based on the cases analysed here, the local marketing communications were in most of the cases left at the disposal of the dealers. However, this has been done under the close supervision of the companies, and frequently the dealers consulted with the company on marketing issues. Therefore, the management of international markets has to be flexible on the one hand and very strategic on the other hand in order to maintain the company's brand integrity.

Based on the findings in our study, we argue that all six dimensions of the framework in Figure 2 will have a major impact on the success of repositioning a brand to an upper segment. Clearly, this evolution will have a stronger effect if all six dimensions are simultaneously met.

6. Conclusions and Lessons

This paper has contributed to the area of brand repositioning, and more specifically to repositioning to upscale segments. Based on previous studies, we have elaborated a model that explains the concepts that serve as a building block for the repositioning process. Therefore, in order to understand this process all relevant aspects, namely initial positioning, brand identity and touchpoints, should be taken into consideration. Separately, they will have only a limited effect on the firm's success in repositioning. Furthermore, it is important to note that brand identity and touchpoints are those elements that can be restructured and reinforced, while the initial positioning has already created a brand perception in the customer's mind, so that it cannot be radically changed at once. Instead, in the process of repositioning the strong sides of the initial positioning should be emphasized and at the same time the weak sides should be eliminated. It should be noted that brand repositioning as an innovative strategy should meet the specific local or national customers' wishes. In our case studies on Sweden, it was clear that the need for high quality products was one of the drivers of the companies' new strategies.

This study has presented a novel framework for better understanding the key dimensions of successful brand repositioning to upscale markets. With this model we have complemented

previous studies on brand repositioning to upscale markets which, to our knowledge, are rather rare. Furthermore, the various dimensions of our new framework are rooted in the core concepts identified in the scattered literature. These six dimensions could be applied in future research exploring the specificity of companies activating both in premium and luxury market segments. Other directions for future research could be to explore the dimensions of successful brand repositioning of companies that changed their value proposition to be able to target downscale markets. And yet another area of particular interest could be the change in the customer behaviour as a result of the company's repositioning to another segment.

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